

Mangrove Kingfisher *Halcyon senegaloides* inland in eastern Zambia

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Martin-chasseur des mangroves *Halcyon senegaloides* en Zambie orientale. Un Martin-chasseur des mangroves *Halcyon senegaloides* a été observé dans la vallée de la Luangwa en Zambie orientale en septembre–octobre 2004 et 2005. Il s'agit de la donnée la plus continentale à ce jour. Cette période coïncide avec la saison de reproduction et pose à nouveau la question d'une hybridation possible avec l'espèce la plus proche, le Martin-chasseur du Sénégal *H. senegalensis*.

Summary. A Mangrove Kingfisher *Halcyon senegaloides* photographed in the Luangwa Valley in eastern Zambia is by far the furthest inland yet known, and raises again the possibility of breeding birds being in contact with the closely related Woodland Kingfisher *H. senegalensis*, and perhaps hybridising.

On 23 October 2004 DT observed and photographed a *Halcyon* kingfisher which possessed all the characters of Mangrove Kingfisher *H. senegaloides*, at Kasikezi lagoon, south of Nsefu camp, in the South Luangwa National Park, eastern Zambia (12°56'S 31°54'E). This confirmed her suspicion regarding a bird seen less well, at some distance, in September. In that year she saw it on another three days, the last time on 30 October (when her safaris in the area ended for the season). On 7 September 2005 the bird was again

seen in the same place, and thereafter several times a week, up to and including 26 October, when the arrival of large numbers of Great White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* may have prompted it to move. There was no further sightings up to 1 November, the end of the 2005 safari season. Better photos were obtained (see Fig. 1), and the identification was confirmed in 2005 by other observers, including Robin Pope. This locality is at least 750 km north-west of the nearest point on the East African coast, and on a river that is on the western side of a watershed.

Field notes were made in collaboration with Robin Pope. It was a kingfisher the size of a



Figure 1. Adult Mangrove Kingfisher *Halcyon senegaloides*, South Luangwa National Park, Zambia, 30 September 2005. Note the heavy, deep-based, mainly red bill, the black mark not extending behind the eye and the grey-brown crown. The very short tail appears abnormal, suggesting the feathers may have been growing (Deb Tittle)

Adulte Martin-chasseur des mangroves *Halcyon senegaloides*, Parc National du Sud Luangwa, Zambie, 30 septembre 2005. Noter l'épaisseur du bec, presque entièrement rouge, le fait que la marque noire ne s'étend pas derrière l'œil et la calotte gris-brun. La très courte queue paraît anormale et semble indiquer que les retrices étaient en train de pousser (Deb Tittle)



Figure 2. Adult Senegal Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis*, South Luangwa National Park, Zambia, 20 November 2004. Note the black on the lower mandible, the thin black wedge behind the eye and the grey crown faintly washed blue (Alex Paul)

Adulte Martin-chasseur du Sénégal *Halcyon senegalensis*, Parc National du Sud Luangwa, Zambie, 20 novembre 2004. Noter le noir sur la mandible inférieure, le mince trait noir derrière l'œil et la calotte grise faiblement lavée de bleu (Alex Paul)

Woodland Kingfisher *H. senegalensis*, but with a completely red bill which appeared larger than that of a Woodland. The bill was reminiscent of a kookaburra *Dacelo* sp., being rather deep-based in the centre where it almost did not close, with black spiky ends at the tip of both lower and upper mandibles. The black slash through the eye did not extend behind it. The electric blue of the upperparts was similar to Woodland Kingfisher; head and chest were entirely smoky grey (whereas the race of Woodland Kingfisher occurring in Zambia, *H. s. cyanoleucus*, has the grey crown faintly washed with blue). Tail very short, barely extending beyond the wingtips. Legs appeared brownish. The underwing-coverts were occasionally glimpsed as the bird flew, and showed a black mark. The bird was heard to call following a heavy storm on 28 September: it was a striking noise, slightly similar to that of Woodland Kingfisher (an abundant breeder at this time in the Luangwa Valley), but jerky and more strident. The call was compared by DT to those presented by Gibbon (2003), and was considered identical to the second phrase of Mangrove Kingfisher.

The bird did not appear to be nesting and was apparently unmated, never being seen with any other. It favoured shady perches in a *Capparis tomentosa* or fallen trees in or beside the water. It still-hunted from perches 1 m above the lagoon, and was seen to catch a small fish and a frog.

Distribution of Mangrove Kingfisher

Current literature would suggest that the nearest locality to the Luangwa Valley, and hitherto the furthest inland, is Sena, on the lower Zambezi in Mozambique (Fry *et al.* 1988, 1992). Details of this locality have not been published; according to Hanmer (1984) this is based on a plot on the map in Fry (1978). However, it seems likely that plot (as far as can be judged on a small-scale map) refers to the sight record from Mopeia at 17°58'S 35°42'E (Hanmer 1976), and in the absence of further evidence we suggest the occurrence at Sena requires confirmation. Although Hanmer (1989) admitted that 'up to 1984 I was not aware of all the plumage differences between these two closely related kingfishers,' she believes it was correctly identified, and adds that she did not notice any unusual *H. senegalensis* at Mopeia (D. Hanmer *in litt.* 2005). This record may be correct, as the nearest confirmed record is from Inhamintanga (M. P.

S. Irwin *in* Benson 1982, Hanmer 1984), inland from the Lower Zambezi in Mozambique, at 18°13'S 35°10'E (c.650 km south-east of Nsefu in the Luangwa Valley, and 125 km inland).

In South Africa records of Mangrove Kingfisher have been claimed from as far as 400 km inland in Kruger National Park, but they are considered by Tarboton *et al.* (1987) to be unconfirmed, in view of the known identification problems.

There is no evidence that birds range very far inland in East Africa. All Important Bird Areas in Tanzania from which there are definite records are coastal (Baker & Baker 2002). In Kenya, Mangrove Kingfisher occurs principally in the coastal lowlands with rainfall of more than 500 mm p.a., where it 'extends quite far inland' (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989), though no localities are given. The furthest inland on the map in Lewis & Pomeroy (1989) would seem to be the lower Tana River; Andrews *et al.* (1975) found it there while they were based at Hewani (02°15'S 40°10'E), c.60 km from the coast. No inland records are specifically mentioned by Britton (1980), followed by Short *et al.* (1990). Nor is it clear how far inland the northern populations in Somalia might range, though the map in Ash & Miskell (1998) suggests this might be some 70 km, on the lower Jubba River. The known distribution of Mangrove Kingfisher is plotted in Fig. 3.

Variation in Woodland Kingfishers

Woodland Kingfisher normally has just the upper mandible red, the lower being black, whereas in Mangrove Kingfisher the entire bill is red (apart from the very tip). Changes of bill colour with age in *H. senegalensis* are discussed by Milstein (1962). Hockey (1997) claims that some Woodland Kingfishers do have 'all-red bills', but no reference is given and none of the aberrant birds reported by Fry (1983) and Hanmer (1989) had completely red bills.

Examination of several hundred museum specimens of Woodland Kingfisher has shown that traces of red on the lower mandible occur only rarely, and vary in extent (Fry 1983). The occurrence of no fewer than 14 individuals in the Lower Shire Valley with some red on the lower mandible (Hanmer 1989) has raised the question of whether or not there is an influence of Mangrove Kingfisher, perhaps through hybridisation. The

occurrence of a bird far inland in eastern Zambia with all the characters of pure Mangrove Kingfisher suggests that the two species may well come into contact when breeding, and further observation might well prove that hybridisation occurs. It is hoped that observers in areas where both do or might occur will pay careful attention to the issue.

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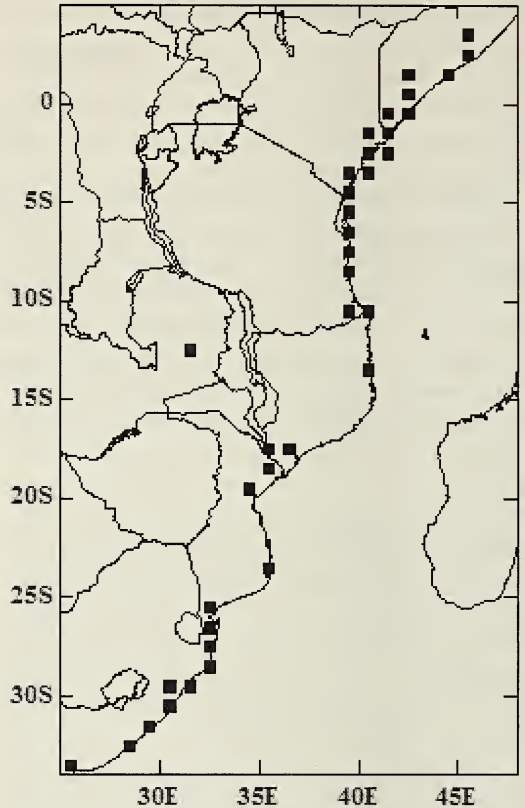


Figure 3. Distribution of Mangrove Kingfisher *Halcyon senegaloides* (R. J. Dowsett)

Répartition du Martin-chasseur des mangroves *Halcyon senegaloides* (R. J. Dowsett)

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